

deeper and more yearning grew the love in Judy's heart. And to the little flickering blaze she would whisper:

"Tell me what I kin do! Oh, tell me what I kin do!"

EVERY day Nance came to bring her wood and water. Judy no longer had strength enough to take them from her at the door, but her fingers could work still. Faster and faster she made them fly. Sometimes, at the very sight of the little garments she was making, Nance would turn and stalk out without a word. At other times she would sit down and watch her bitterly, as if it were some penance to which she was subjecting herself. Never once did she offer any comment till one day when Judy was rounding off the toe of what was surely the tiniest red stocking that ever was conceived of, it seemed as if the limit of her endurance had been reached.

"Hain't ye never goin' to be done with that truck?" she demanded scornfully.

For a minute Judy did not answer. Then she lifted her eyes up bravely to Nance.

"I hain't makin' these'n fer me," she said. "These here—air fer you."

Nance sprang to her feet, and for one terrible moment she glared at Judy as if she could have struck her down dead. But something in the pure love and the courage of Judy's eyes vanquished her. She turned away, with a sob, and burst into tears. Wild, despairing tears they were, hopeless, helpless, of a primitive creature brought to bay. With them Judy mingled her gentler ones.

"Nance," she begged, "don't turn from me. Can't ye see how I love ye? My heart—hit's jest plumb a-breakin' fer ye, Nance. Tell me what I kin do."

"Ye kin kill me, I reckon, if ye will. I've tried to, but I can't."

"Tell me somethin' I kin do—to help—"

"Hit's the one thing can't be help."

"Thar's nothin' in life can't be help, even if it's only by havin' some one that cares live through it with ye; an' lovin' ye more fer what ye're havin' to bear."

Somehow, as Judy spoke, the first intimation of the truth of her words dawned on Nance's soul. Hitherto in all her life she had never asked for help from any one, nor wanted it. Many a little wild creature had she succored in days gone by; many a little calf lost in the woods had she brought back to its mother; many a little lamb delivered from the dogs; many a little fallen nestling put back tenderly under its mother's wing. But she had never known what it was to be gentle with any human creature, nor to let one be gentle with her. Now, in her need, something of the sweetness of dependence was revealed to her.

"But, if anybody helps, hit hadn't ought to be you," she said brokenly. "I've been 'bout as hateful to ye as a human critter could be. But oh, if ye knew what I'd been through! If only I'd never seed town!"

THE very second evenin' attar I got there we went to a set-runnin' out at Jim Benton's, two mile out o' town, a whole gang of us, some on nags, some afoot, but all of 'em, only me, two an' two. Then Harve Stoten come along. He was alone too, an' pretty soon, him an' me, we was two an' two like the rest. They all went on, a-talkin' an' a-laughin' to one another, back an' forth. But somehow, once I'd laid eyes on Harve an' Harve on me, we'd no eyes fer the rest of 'em. They begun a-devilin' us 'fore ever we'd got there, but we didn't care. Seemed like they wasn't none of 'em real, only him an' me.

"An' attar we got there, they was jest like a pack o' fleas hoppin' round, with no more sense to 'em than that. We was standin' over by the door. They was linin' up fer another set, an' they gin us a call, but we didn't make nary move to go towards 'em. We stood thar still,

a-lookin' out into the night, wishin' we was still a-comin' hand in hand that-a-way. He didn't say, 'Let's go out!' nor I didn't neither; but thar was the open door, an' the night jest a-waitin'.

"As long as we could hear 'em laugh an' holler an' tromp the floor to the tune o' the old fiddle, we walked along slow; an' the woods—oh, the woods was nicer than ever the road was nice. When we come to whar there weren't ary sound 'cept jest us an' the trees an' the little critters o' the woods, we stopped. 'Twere so still! An' hit seemed like the night hadn't never been night afore. Hit were somethin' so soft an' so sweet ye hoped hit 'u'd never stop. An' ye loved hit fer shuttin' ye in that-a-way from ev'ry one.

he said he would. He didn't come that afternoon. When I asked fer him, 'He's loved an' left ye, that's what he's done,' they laughed. 'Didn't he tell ye he was goin' fer a soldier to-day?' Ye could ha' knocked me over whar I stood. 'I was thinkin' 'twas to-night he were a-goin', I made out to say. 'How'd ye reckon he was goin' to git into Louisville in time to shoulder his kit an' git into line with the rest of 'em marchin' out fer the Philip-pines at seven-ten to-night? Ye'll not see him ag'in fer a good three year an' more.'

"That was the kind of a man he were.

AT first I couldn't think o' ary thing 'ceptin' jest that he was gone, an' I were done fer. An' then I found 'twas wus-

'way off to the top o' the mounting like this. Can't ye jest see 'em toddlin' about together, each of a size?"

"An' when hit grows up big enough 'o ask whar hits pappy is?"

"We'll tell hit hit ain't got nary papp; an' hit'll think hits pappy's dead."

"Other folks'll tell hit differ'n't."

"By that time hit'll have a papp; Ye'll have l'arned to love some other man by that time."

"An' who'd ever want me?"

"Men hain't like that. A man tha' 'u'd punish ye fer the wrong some other man done ye wouldn't be worth the havin'."

Nance shook her head.

"I hain't purty like you. Nary 'nother man'll ever come fer me. But that don't seem to matter now. Hit were wrong to do as I done—I see that now; but no power on airth could ha' made me seen hit then."

"Ye didn't know—we don't ary one of us. Some of us has better luck, that's all."

And somehow, as Nance looked at it with Judy, it began to seem as if it was the same thing that was happening to them both. Before that she had not even accepted her fate. Now she met and rose above it.

"Only Pop—he'll be all broke up when he hears."

"Not when he sees how ye're takin' it. An' when hit comes, think how he'll love hit! Oh, hit's happy times that's on ahead; don't ye see?"

If the struggle wasn't over yet for Nance, every day and every hour told. It was good to see the newly awakened love and gentleness on her face. The whole growth of her soul was there to read sometimes in the worshiping look she bent on Judy.

"Tain't only that ye've l'arned me to love you," she said one day, in a rare little rush of tenderness, "but ye've l'arned me to love hit. Seems like I can't wait till hit's here."

Up there on Big Stoney, winter wasn't lonely any longer.

AS they sat together by the fire, Judy's dream was vague and diffuse. It was as if she were looking out upon a sea of happiness too deep to probe, too vast to contemplate in its entirety, but so soft, so pretty, so blue, her feet couldn't help hurrying toward it. Now its little waves sang one song, now another. And how sweet were the little breezes that blew from it!

But Nance's vision took on clearer shapes.

"If hit's a boy-child," she would say to herself, "hit won't miss hits pappy so much. I kin l'arn hit all the things he would. I kin l'arn hit to make hits little bows an' arrers, an' hits marbles outen clay, an' hits little flute outen a holler reed. I kin l'arn hit to swim, an' shoot a gun, an' tell hits way in the woods. An' I kin l'arn hit to name the trees, an' all the little roots an' harbs, an' what each un's good for. An' thar's all the little wild critters to l'arn hit, an' how some on 'em dens in the cliffs, an' some in the holler trees. An' I kin tell hit tales—Injun tales, an' all the old huntin' tales I ever heered Pop an' the others tell."

And thus to Nance the unimaginative was imagination granted. As she sat there, winter vanished, and it was always spring. The little streams were running, and the woods were clothed with green. And as she roamed through them a vision persisted of a little boy, quick and lithe and sunny-haired, now running on before her, now toddling at her side. And every time he heard a bird sing, or pulled a speckled trout out on his little line, it was to her he turned his eyes of pure delight. Every time he picked a flower or found a pretty rock, it was to her he brought his treasure—to her, always to her! And

"Finally, one cold, wet day in December, Pop found her huddled in her shawl by the fire. 'Town were too much fer ye?' he asked. 'Yes,' she replied. 'I'm back—to stay—I reckon.'"

Seemed like hit shet ye in from ev'rything that ever was, or was to be.

"Up in the sky were a moon, jest a littly-bit of a new moon. We set thar an' looked up to it through the trees. Seemed like hit were a-travelin' down the sky straight to us, closer an' closer, an' us jest a-waitin' fer hit to come the rest o' the way. But when hit reached the mounting hit drapped down ahint thar instead. But the plumb dark was nicer'n ary light that ever was.

"To-night's ourn," he said. 'To-morrow we'll be married, won't we, Nance?' An' I says, 'Yes, to-morrow we'll be married.' But to-morrow—to-morrow was so God-a-mighty fur away—

"When we come back to town, the little birds was jest pipin' up to sing in the trees. Their sleepy little twitter were so sweet! Hit sounded jest like little childern look when they stand thar a-smilin' to ye with the sleep still in their eyes. I didn't know I'd never hear 'em attar that without cussin' myself.

"He didn't come by at noontime, like

ser'n that. 'I won't never go back home no more,' I said. I got me a place to work, an' ev'ry cent I made I laid it by. 'Atter a while,' I thought, 'when the time comes, I'll go off to Louisville or som'eres like that whar no one knows me.' All the time I was so lonesome fer the mountings it might nigh kilt me. Atter a while it got so that bein' homesick that-a-way were wusser'n anything else. I had to come or die, an' I come; but I knowed all the way I were goin' to kill myself attar I got here."

"Poor Nance!"

"A sight o' women die that-a-way, but I won't die. I wish't I could."

"No, ye don't. Ye wouldn't want to die an' leave hit all to hitself, would ye? If you was the sickliest critter on airth, ye'd be bound to live an' look attar it."

"Pore little critter! Hit'll need some one, comin' into the world that-a-way."

"Hit'll come into the world jest as dear an' sweet an' full o' play as ary other. They all come alike. We'll bring 'em up together. One alone 'u'd be lonesome,